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SELECTING A COLLEGE PRESIDENT.

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SELECTION OF A PRESIDENT IS ONE OF A COLLEGE BOARD'S GREATEST RESPONSIBILITIES AND CALLS FOR A HIGH LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM AND MUTUAL RESPECT ON THE PART OF THE BOARD MEMBERS. THE CRITERIA AND QUALIFICATIONS TO BE MET BY CANDIDATES ARE DEPENDENT ON THE OBJECTIVES OF THE COLLEGE, LOCAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE TYPE OF PERSON SOUGHT, SPECIAL CONDITIONS AT THE COLLEGE (E.G., A BUILDING PROGRAM), AND THE BOARD-PRESIDENT RELATIONSHIP. FLEXIBILITY IN THE LIST OF QUALIFICATIONS WILL PREVENT ELIMINATION OF POTENTIALLY STRONG CANDIDATES. ELEMENTS IN THE SEARCH SHOULD INCLUDE PLACEMENT OFFICES AT MAJOR UNIVERSITIES, EXAMINATION OF ROSTERS OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, SERVICES OF AN EXPERT SCREENING COMMITTEE, INTERVIEWS WITH THE BEST QUALIFIED CANDIDATES, AND SELECTION OF THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE, FOLLOWED BY CONTRACT NEGOTIATION, PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE APPOINTMENT, AND NOTIFICATION TO UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES. BOARDS SHOULD AVOID INJUDICIOUS COMMENTS TO THE PRESS, RELEASE OF CANDIDATES' NAMES, UNILATERAL ACTION BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, INADEQUATE TIME TABLES, FAILURE TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DECISION, AND FAILURE TO CONFORM TO ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN THE "JUNIOR COLLEGE JOURNAL," VOLUME 35, NUMBER 7, APRIL 1965. (WO)

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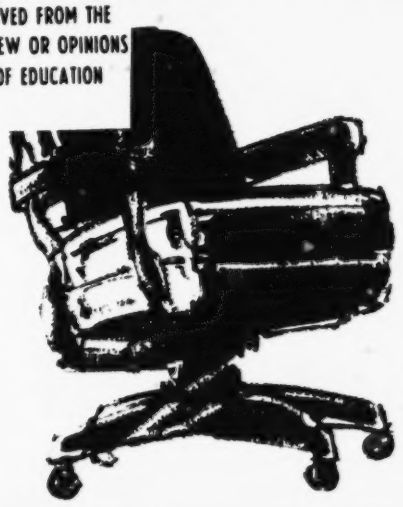
By Bill J. Priest



SELECTING A COLLEGE PRESIDENT

"It is as important a decision as any board can make. On this decision hinges the character of leadership of the school systems affected for years to come."

Thus the 1960 American Association of School Administrators' yearbook describes the task of selecting a chief school administrator. It is a task facing an ever-increasing number of junior college boards of trustees. With the rapid growth of the junior college movement, the importance of securing the best available talent for the key position of chief administrator cannot be overemphasized.

Although the observations and suggestions that follow are intended primarily for junior college boards, the principles which they reflect no doubt have relevancy to administrators in general, both inside and outside the ranks of education.

There is always a risk of being too prescriptive in giving procedural advice. There is, also, the danger of being so ambiguous and philosophical that the advice becomes ineffectual. An attempt is made here to strike a useful balance between these two extremes.

The typical, new governing board facing the assignment of selecting a college president finds itself in a situation which is somewhat less than ideal. The trustees are usually community leaders who may have had no previous direct contact with the junior college movement. This means that they are functioning without the man on whom they will subsequently lean most heavily for leadership and orientation.

He must be selected and employed before the board and the college can begin to function effectively. Except in small communities, the board members typically do not know each other well and have not yet developed the smooth working relationships which are so desirable when tackling a project of this high magnitude and importance. Very early in the selection process they may begin to feel pressures from vested interests to appoint a college president whose views are in accord with the goals of a particular pressure group.

The assignment calls for a high level of professionalism and mutual respect on the part of the board members. They should, all the while, keep in sharp focus the long-range goals of the institution they have been chosen to govern.

This fact suggests that the first step should be to identify these long-range goals. They will be closely related to the community characteristics and the philosophy of administration of the college. Both factors are important in determining the type of person who should be selected. Board members must also become acquainted with legal controls which have fixed certain objectives for all public community colleges in their particular state.

One useful approach is to develop a list of key questions, answers to which will help clarify what board members want in the way of a college president.

Following are several examples of such key questions:

1. What are the major objectives of the college?
2. Are there peculiar local factors which will affect the type of person being sought?
3. Is the board seeking a man who will make a career as chief administrator of the college or do they want a special job done (i.e. a building program) by a person who has great ability in this particular field, but who may not be a generalist?
4. What role does the board expect the president to play in the administration of the college? Is the objective to obtain a president who will supply strong educational leadership to the college, including recommendations on future plans, or is it to employ a person to implement plans which have already crystallized?

The second step in the search normally should be to develop a statement of formal criteria, including

qualifications desired of applicants for the position. Usually these qualifications can be grouped into three or four major categories, such as academic training and certification, experience, personal characteristics, and educational philosophy.

The extent of detail in the criteria statement depends upon local desires and the mandates inherent in answers to the "key questions" developed to guide the board. However, it is advisable to remain flexible, and keep the qualifications list fairly general to avoid eliminating potentially strong candidates. An applicant may become available who does not meet in every respect a very precise list of qualifications, but whose excellence in some areas may more than offset deficiencies in others. It may be desirable to prepare a brochure which supplies pertinent facts for prospective applicants. These facts may, in turn, serve as a preliminary screening device.

Following is a sample statement of qualifications prepared by the board of trustees of Contra Costa Junior College District in California to assist them in a recent search for a new chief administrator:

A. *Academic training and credential*

1. Possess Ph.D. or Ed. D. degree or a national reputation and experience which would justify waiver of degree.
2. Hold, or be eligible for, a California administrative credential which authorizes service at the junior college level.

B. *Experience*

1. At least five years of highly successful administrative experience, preferably top level, in a multicampus system, and preferably in junior college; experience in a college or university also favorably regarded.
2. Experience in working directly with a board of education in a district with complex administrative problems inherent in a district in a metropolitan area.
3. Experience and demonstrated leadership in working with community groups. Competence in the field of finance and educational and physical plant planning.
4. A breadth of experience and competence in working with faculty and citizens in meeting educational issues and planning the development of an educational program.

C. *Personal characteristics and commitments*

1. A firm commitment to the open and flexible nature of the junior college as an institution serving students with diverse abilities and purposes.
2. A commitment to academic freedom, and enthusiasm for being part of an intellectual environment.
3. A commitment to the idea that the individual junior college should develop a distinctive philosophy and character within the framework of the system; that in this process cooperative effort is essential with faculties participating with the presidents in the decision-making process, especially when it relates to instruction.
4. An ability to define goals and programs, to delegate responsibility, deal justly with those with whom he is associated and to stand on principle while being flexible in developing a program or meeting an issue.
5. Age preferably between thirty-five and fifty-five.

As soon as there is agreement among board members on a description of "the ideal college president" for the institution, as spelled out in a statement of qualifications and other selection criteria, the next step is to begin the actual search.

Sources of Junior College Presidents

The big question at this point is, "Where is the best man likely to be found?" The job should be listed immediately with the educational placement offices of major universities throughout the country. These offices will nominate candidates and/or notify potential applicants of the position. An examination should be made of professional association rosters, including those of state, regional, and national junior college associations. The lists may produce names of desirable candidates whom the board may invite to apply.

A procedure that has been successfully employed by many boards is the establishment of a screening committee composed of junior college specialists from universities and/or leaders from state and national junior college associations. These consultants should be well-acquainted with top personnel in the junior college field. Among institutions with junior college specialists on their faculties are the ten universities which operate the Junior College Leadership Programs. Fees for such consultants may vary but are likely to be approximately $100 per day, plus expenses.

The trustees may or may not wish to give directives to the screening committee concerning the number of "finalists" it wishes recommended for personal interviews by the board. But it is unreasonable to expect a large number of applicants to assume the expense of reporting for a personal interview. Three to five candidates may be an optimum number for the board to interview personally. Such number may be invited to confer with the board, with the travel expense borne by the board.

In addition to its service in narrowing the field, the screening committee may encourage the submission of applications from prospects who meet the criteria for the position set by the board.

It is appropriate at this point to suggest a number of pitfalls which a board of trustees should avoid during the process of locating and selecting a president. These include:

1. Injudicious comments to the press regarding the search.
2. Public release of names of persons under consideration.

3. Unilateral action by individual trustees without delegation of authority from the entire board.

4. Setting of a timetable which does not permit time for adequate search and deliberation.

5. Failure to conform to the procedure agreed upon, thus creating confusion and uncertainty among both applicants and the general public.

6. Failure by the board to accept responsibility for making a decision—over-involvement of lay advisers.

7. Committing the college to various policies or personnel appointments prior to selection of and receipt of advice from the chief administrative officer.

8. Failure to respect the ethics of the education profession (i.e., expecting applicant to engage in procedures that include elements which are crass or professionally offensive).

The Final Decision

After criteria have been developed, a screening committee retained, and applications sought and received, the next step in the selection process is reaching a final decision on the individual to whom the board wishes to make an offer of employment. The decision can be made more easily if, after its deliberations, the screening committee or its chairman meets with the trustees for a detailed briefing on the whys and wherefores of its recommendations. The meeting is normally followed by the board's thorough examination of leading applicants' qualifications.

One school of thought suggests that the board may gain access to more highly qualified talent if it elects, after extensive research and study of the prospects, to invite only the top candidate for an interview. This individual is invited to confer with the board with the understanding that he will be employed subject to a satisfactory interview and a meeting of minds among the board members and himself.

This approach is based on the supposition that while outstanding administrators are not at any given time looking for a new position and therefore may not apply, they will often respond to a well-defined invitation to an interview, especially if the position is sufficiently attractive in terms of such things as salary, growth potential, professional environment.

Whether the board decides to interview one or several finalists there are a number of important benefits in a personal interview both for the trustees and for the applicants.

Many factors are revealed in an interview which are not apparent from personnel papers. These include an individual's dress, grooming, manners, articulateness, personality, and attitudes. The interview also provides a preview of the interaction among the personalities which are destined to play the key roles in the development of the new college.

It should be noted that the interview is not a one-way street. The board has certain important responsibilities in the meeting. The man it wants very likely has other job opportunities and he may need to be convinced that he should cast his professional lot with the board interviewing him.

In fairness to the college, the prospective president and the board, it is advisable for the interviewers to be gracious but forthright. Both the board and the college president must be in agreement on fundamental goals or excessive conflict and impairment of the educational program is inevitable.

Contract Negotiations

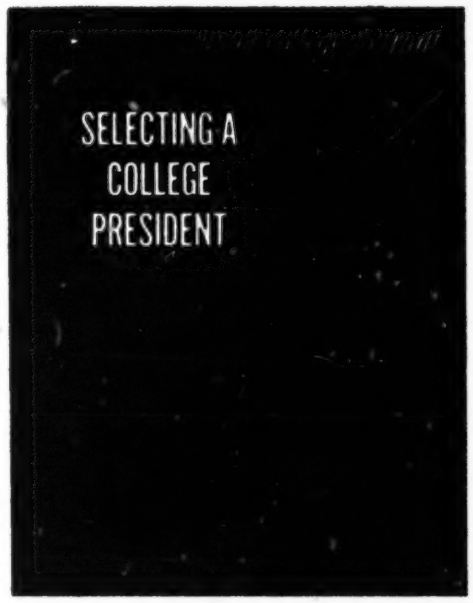
After the board has reached a final decision on its candidate and he has given tentative acceptance, there remains the matter of a contract to be negotiated. Terms of the contract will, of course, depend upon the outcome of negotiations designed to produce terms which are satisfactory and acceptable to both parties. Provisions normally included in such a contract are the amount of annual salary, fringe benefits which may be tax advantages for the president at little or no additional cost to the college, the period of contract, provisions for periodic review of the contract, and provisions for involvement of the president in state, regional, and national junior college activities.

Once the contract has been negotiated and signed, the board should not overlook one or two additional steps. The first is a public announcement of its decision. The selection of a college president is significant news and will be reported by local news media. The announcement should show that the trustees have made an important decision and why they are confident it will work well. The fanfare accompanying the selection announcement should conform with community mores.

As a final step in the selection process, the board should not forget to thank the individuals and agencies who have helped in the quest, and return any materials which have been borrowed from them. Unsuccessful candidates should be notified promptly and thanked for their interest and cooperation.

It is desirable to keep a record of the campaign to locate a president. A short, written critique for the files will be valuable if and when the board is faced with the task of filling the position again.

The selection of a president may well be the most important decision the board will ever make. May it be made wisely, for the institution's future will reflect the wisdom of the choice.



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